DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 292 166 CS 506 090

AUTHOR Willmington, S. Clay
TITLE Oral Communication Assessment Procedures and Instrument Development in Higher Education: II.
PUB DATE Nov 87
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (73rd, Boston, MA, November 5-8, 1987). Commissioned by the Committee on Assessment and Testing of the Speech Communication Association. For a related document, see ED 236 721.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; *Comparative Analysis; *Curriculum Development; Evaluation Criteria; *Higher Education; School Surveys; *Speech Communication; Testing Programs
IDENTIFIERS Speech Communication Association; *Speech Communication Education

ABSTRACT

In order to discover and evaluate the nature of large-scale, standardized assessment programs in colleges and universities in 1986, a survey followed up the Committee on Assessment and Testing (CAT)-sponsored study of 1982. A questionnaire was mailed to speech departments of more than 2,000 institutions, asking first whether the institution has (1) a standardized method for assessing communication skills outside of a required speech course; and (2) a required speech communication course that uses standardized procedures/instruments. In a second phase, 112 responses were received as the result of a direct mailing to directors of programs in the 1982 study and to institutions that indicated (in 1982) that they were developing a program. The 57 institutions who had a program were sent a questionnaire in which they were asked to report the details of their programs; 53 responded. Thirty-nine schools were included in both studies, and there were 14 new schools. In both studies, efforts were made to locate uniform testing programs. Results revealed four main purposes for uniform assessment of students' communication skills: course exemption (58%), placement/screening (34%), assessment within a class (19%), and teacher certification (13%). The most typical exemption test was a demonstration of competence in public speaking. The current study showed 10% more of the institutions using assessment procedures for either "exemption" or "placement/screening purposes" than the earlier study, and 30% of the institutions testing listening skills, as opposed to 18% in the earlier study. Findings suggest that respondents are still searching for "the" way to assess students' oral communication competence in valid and reliable ways. (Eight endnotes are included.) (JK)

ED292166

ORAL COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES AND INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: II

BY

S. Clay Willmington
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

Commissioned by the
Committee on Assessment and Testing
Philip M. Backlund, Chair

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Clay Willmington

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SCA
Speech Communication Association
5105 Backlick Road, Suite E
Annandale, Virginia 22003

Note: This study is a follow-up to the 1983 study by R.B. Rubin, M.R. Moore, J.Sisco, and R. Quianthy entitled Oral Communication Assessment Procedures and Instrument Development in Higher Education, published by the Speech Communication Association, Annandale, VA.

CS506070

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ASSESSMENT OF ORAL COMMUNICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, assessing skills in speaking has meant individual teachers' developing and using tests within their own classrooms as opposed to using large-scale, standardized procdures like those in disciplines such as English, foreign languages, and mathematics. For example, a recent study of the basic speech course at U.S. colleges and universities found that only 7% of the respondents administer departmental-wide exams, and by far the greater number of respondents (79%) reported that exams are teacher-made.[1]

But slowly, within the past ten years, some notable attempts at large-scale, standardized assessments of oral communication have begun. Among the first was in 1977 by the Gary, Indiana School Corporation, followed by state-wide tests of competencies in oral communication for high school graduation in Massachusetts (1979), Vermont (1981), and Hawaii (1983).[2] By 1982, large-scale, standardized testing in oral communication was recognized in higher education.

But because no one was certain what the "state of the art" was in the assessment of oral communication of college students, the Committee on Assessment and Testing (CAT) of the Speech Communication Association (SCA) undertook a survey. A committee of four persons was asked to discover the range and degree of assessment in colleges and universities, to evaluate these methods, and to make this information available to potential users of these instruments. This effort resulted in an SCA publication, Oral Communication Assessment Procedures and Instrument Development in Higher Education,[3] and an article, "Communication Assessment Instruments and Procedures in Higher Education" (Rebecca B. Rubin, Communication Education, April, 1984).[4]

The present study was to follow-up the CAT-sponsored study of 1982. The purpose of this study was to discover the nature of large-scale, standardized assessment programs in colleges and universities in 1986.

Although information was sought on large-scale programs in which standardized instruments and procedures were used, some programs are reported which are technically neither. To illustrate, some large-scale programs are reported because of their fairly sophisticated examination procedures even though they are used to test only a handful of students per year. Too, standardized tests are generally defined as published products, both valid and reliable, which have tables of norms that can be used for comparative purposes. Most of the instruments reported here, by contrast , are locally prepared tests for exclusive use on the local campus. Thus, most of the assessment programs described here are more properly characterized as uniform programs in that the questions asked of the student are the same for all students and the criteria used to assess the behaviors or knowledge are specified and followed uniformly by those doing the assessment. This criterion eliminated from consideration those evaluations where an instructor creates his or her own speech rating sheet. If departmental standards involving assessment instruments were used in multiple sections of the course, they were considered to be uniform and therefore included in the report.

METHOD

In the first phase, a questionnaire was mailed to 2000+ institutions on SCA's list of college/university speech departments. Two questions were asked: (1) Does your institution have a standardized method for assessing speech and/or other communication skills outside of, in addition to, or in place of, a required speech course? (2) Does your institution have a speech communication course required for graduation that uses standardized assessment procedures/instruments? In the second

phase, there was a direct mailing to persons listed as responsible for a program in the 1982 study, and to institutions that indicated in 1982 that they were in the process of developing a program.

A total of 112 responses were received. Of the 112 responses, 55 did not have a program as described, and 57 did. These 57 persons were sent a three-page questionnaire in which they were asked to report the details of their program. Fifty-three were returned. Those 53 programs are included in this report.

RESULTS

The respondents constituted quite a cross section. Size of student bodies ranged from under 1,000 to over 40,000, with private, public, two-year, four-year, community/junior, and graduate institutions represented.

Of the 45 responses included in the earlier study reported by Rubin et. al. (1983), 39 are also included in this report. Of the remaining five institutions, two have dropped their programs, and three did not reply to the questionnaire. So along with the 39 schools included both studies, there were 14 new schools reporting this time, which means 26% of the institutions in this study were not included previously.

In both studies, efforts were made to locate uniform testing programs. However, there is no assurance that we have been able to locate all of them. In all likelihood, there are still departments out there which deliberately and systematically attempt to assess uniformly across sections of a single course, for example, which we have not reached in this survey.

An examination of the responses shows that there were four main purposes for uniform assessment of students' communication skills: course exemption, placement/screening, assessment within a class, and teacher certification. Of the four major purposes, course exemption (58%) was reported as the most frequent purpose for an assessment program, followed by placement/screening (34%), assessment within class

(19%), and finally, teacher certification (13%).

The most typical type of exemption test was a demonstration of competence in public speaking, indicating that public speaking receives the focus of attention in the basic course, a fact consistent with the latest national survey.[5] For exemption, the student typically must pass both a written test on public speaking concepts and an oral test in the form of preparing and delivering a public speech. In some cases, only the preparation and presentation of a speech is required. The summary data is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF INSTRUMENTS/PROCEDURES USED
FOR COURSE EXEMPTION

N = 31*

SKILLS	MODE		
	Oral	Written	Oral & Written
Public Speaking	8		22
Speaking	2		
Voice & Articulation	5		
Communication Anxiety		2	
Listening	3	5	1
Interpersonal	3	3	1
Small Group		3	
Communication Theory	1	4	
Reading	1		

* Because some tests assess more than one skill, the total of the columns and rows are greater than the number described.

Duplications exist within the four tables. That is, an institution may have an oral and written public speaking exemption test, a written listening test for teacher certification, and an oral voice and articuation placement instrument. Thus, reference to these assessment procedures appears on three different tables.

While fewer institutions reported standardized procedures used within classes than for exemption, the patterns of assessment are similar. The emphasis for both was on public speaking testing in both the oral and written modes. The in-class standardization of testing is designed to make uniform assessment of students' performances across different sections taught by different instructors. This often

takes the form of using a single set of criteria, a single rating form, or a single written test for all sections. The summary data of instrument/procedures used for assessment within classes is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF INSTRUMENT/PROCEDURES USED
FOR ASSESSMENT WITHIN CLASS

N = 10*

SKILLS	MODE		
	Oral	Written	Oral & Written
Public Speaking	4		6
Voice & Articulation			1
Listening		3	2
Interpersonal			1
Small Group		2	2
Communication Theory		3	1
Reading			1

* Because some tests assess more than one skill, the total of the columns and rows are greater than the number described.

Placement or screening takes place as a means of placing a student into a classroom which can best meet his or her present level of performance. A variety of modes are used. In some cases, knowledge of , and/or ability in, public speaking is assessed to place the student into a class which is consistent with his or her level of public speaking ability. In other institutions, the focus of the test is on voice and articulation where the student is asked either to give a speech, read some literature, participate in an interview, or engage in a combination of these activities. As a result of this kind of assessment, the student can be referred to a speech clinic, an English-as-a-Second-Language class, or a course in voice and diction. A third reason for placement/screening is to determine the student's level of communication anxiety. The instrument most often used for this purpose is the "Personal Report of Communication Apprehension."[6] The summary data of instrument/procedures used for placement/screening is shown in Table 3.

With only seven institutions reporting speech testing as a prerequisite for teacher certification, it is difficult to note any significant results. Not su-

TABLE 3
SUMMARY OF INSTRUMENTS/PROCEDURES USED
FOR PLACEMENT/SCREENING

N = 18*

SKILLS	MODE		
	Oral	Written	Oral & Written
Public Speaking	3	1	5
Speaking	3		
Voice & Articulation	7		
Communication Anxiety		3	
Listening	2	3	
Interpersonal	2		1
Communication Theory		1	
Reading	3		

* Because some tests assess more than one skill, the toatal of the columns and rows are greater than the number described.

prisingly, there is greater emphasis in testing for this purpose upon oral performance compared to knowledge as demonstrated by a written response. In some cases, a student's communication competence is assessed by an interview with one or more faculty members. The summary data of instruments/procedures used for teacher certification is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4
SUMMARY OF INSTRUMENTS/PROCEDURES USED
FOR TEACHER CERTIFICATION

N = 7*

SKILLS	MODE		
	Oral	Written	Oral & Written
Public Speaking	3		1
Speaking	1		
Voice & Articulation	3		
Listening		1	
Interpersonal	1		
Reading	2		

* Because some tests assess more than one skill, the total of the columns and rows are greater than the number described.

As seen in Tables 1-4, the range of skills tested is led by public speaking with 52 (79%) of the institutions testing that skill. The next most frequently tested skill is listening with 20 (30%) positive responses, followed by 15 (23%) institutions reporting voice and articulation testing. A number of respondents reported testing in interpersonal and small group communication and communication theory. While some of this testing involves oral assessment, much of it

occurs as part of a written test in the broader area of public speaking.

The oral mode dominates the methods of assessment used. In 120 (75%) of the responses, an oral test is used, either alone or in combination with a written test. In 79 (58%) of the cases, the test involves a written response, either alone or in combination with an oral performance. The oral-only mode was used by 57 (42%) of the respondents. A combination of oral and written responses was reported 45 (33%) times. Out of the total of 136 responses to the mode used, 34 (25%) reported using a test that involves written responses only.

CONCLUSIONS

Because there are eight more schools included in this report than the earlier one, it is tempting to conclude that standardized assessment in oral communication is on the increase. But caution is necessary. We do know that almost all of the programs reported four years ago continue primarily as they were at that time. But the number of programs we failed to reach for either survey is an unknown quantity, making it impossible to judge increases or decreases in numbers. However, several of the programs reported this time around are brand new. So the data we do have suggest that uniform testing programs in speech may be on the increase in higher education.

Because the questionnaires used in the two studies were somewhat different, it is difficult to assess changes which may have occurred over the four years. But there are some bases for comparison. By and large, data from the two studies show little change. But there are two differences to observe: (1) The current study shows 10% more of the institutions using assessment procedures for either "exemption" or "placement/screening" purposes than the earlier study, 92% compared to 82%. This gain is taken from the "assessment within the class" category. The earlier figure was 29%, compared to 19% this time. (2) The other quite noticeable difference is in listening assessment. Whereas four years ago, only 18% of the respondents were

identified as testing listening, this time there were 30%. This discovery is believable in light of a marked increase of interest in listening in recent years, coupled with the availability of standarized tests in listening, including some which have been recently developed.

As in the first survey, most assessment instruments are locally developed, based upon local expectations in the basic course. These include paper and pencil tests based exclusively upon the textbook(s) used in the course as opposed to generic tests which apply across the range of textbooks. In some instances, institutions are using the recently developed "Communication Competency Assessment Instrument," the first test of overall college level communication competence developed for national use.[7] The only other large-scale generic oral communication test reported for use was the "Wisconsin Interpersonal and Public Speaking Test," developed by persons representing the 13 four-year campuses of the University of Wisconsin System.

The area of listening has produced more standardized tests for large-scale use than any other aspect of communication. Listening tests presently in use and available include the Brown-Carlson Listening Comprehension Test, the Sequential Tests of Education Progress subtest on Listening, the Kentucky Comprehensive Listening Test, and the Watson-Barker Listening Tests.[8]

There are consistencies between the findings of this study and recent surveys of the basic course. For example, the emphasis upon testing in the area of public speaking is consistent with findings that the shift continues in the direction of public speaking as a major focus in the course. It is also consistent with the finding that most exemption tests include both an oral and a written dimension.

There are indications that respondents are still searching for "the" way to validly and reliably assess students' oral communication competence on a large scale. Several persons used terms like "developing," "hoping to ...," and "ex-

perimenting with," which indicate dissatisfaction with the present state of their program. Others made a deliberate plea for help. This suggests that there is considerable interest in the subject. We can expect continued activity in the development and use of standardized assessment in speech.

Endnotes

[1] J.W. Gibson, M.S. Hanna, and B. M. Huddleston, "The Basic Speech Course at U. S. Colleges and Universities," Communication Education, October 1985, pp. 281-291.

[2] S.C. Willmington, "Assessing Oral Communication Performance Skills," paper presented to the Speech Communication Association convention, November, 1983.

[3] R.B. Rubin, M.R. Moore, J. Sisco, and R. Quianthy, "Oral Communication Assessment Procedures and INstrument Development in Higher Education" Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association.

[4] R.B. Rubin, "Communication Assessment Instruments and Procedures in Higher Education," Communication Education, April 1984, pp. 178-180.

[5] Gibson, Hanna, and Huddleston, 281-291

[6] J.C. McCroskey, "Measures of Communication-Bound Anxiety," Speech Monographs, November 1970, pp. 269-277.

[7] R.B. Rubin, "Assessing Speaking and Listening Competence at the College Level: The Communication Competency Assessment Instrument," Communication Education, January 1982, pp. 19-32.

[8] J. Brownell, Building Active Listening Skills, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Publishers, 1986) pp. 60-61.